When You Join the Church

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When You Join the Church

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A Booklet for those who are facing the question of their relationship to the Church. Issued as a part of the Adult Program of Christian Education

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When You Join the Church

This booklet is intended for the inquiring adults and the older young people who may be facing the question of their relationship to the Church, especially for those who are not yet members of any Church. Everything in the booklet could be said with far more fullness; whole books are available on each of the subjects discussed. Pastors will gladly provide fuller presentation either by word of mouth or through adequate books. This discussion is intended only to start thinking and to help to a decision for fellowship with the Church. The booklet assumes that the reader has already faced the earliest question of his relation to the Christian religion and believes himself to be a Christian, so that he is considering the next step in the Christian life. No one way has been found to state for all men what it is to be a Christian, any more than it has been found possible to state what an educated or patriotic or a successful person is. Christ does not reduce his followers to any dead uniformity and he allows no one of them to set himself up as a standard for others. *A Christian is a person who accepts, believes in, and follows Jesus Christ.* The very word implies that much. In following Christ men learn more and more about him. Many questions cannot be answered before the following begins; the answers come as the Christian life goes on. Here we consider some of the steps in that following.

The discussion gathers around these questions:

What is the Church?

What is the Presbyterian Church?

Why should a Christian believer join the Church?

What is required in joining the Presbyterian Church?

What is the Lord's Supper?

What are the principal duties of Church members?

How is one's personal relation to Christ maintained?

How does one go on practicing Christ's way of living?

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The English word "Church" is used in four senses:

1. It may refer to a building erected for religious gatherings.

2. It may refer to a particular congregation, as when we speak of the First Presbyterian Church of any city.

3. At times it refers to a group of individual Churches forming a denomination, the Presbyterian Church or the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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4. It is used with reference to the whole body of Christian believers in all lands, including all denominations. Ordinarily this is what is meant when one is called "a member of the Church."

The most widely distributed religion in the world, claiming the most adherents, touching the most lives and dealing with most life situations, is the Christian religion. The Church is its characteristic institution, the organization in which Christian believers are united for the sake of being better Christians and for better service of the world in the name of Christ. The visible Church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the Christian religion, together with their children.

In this large, broad sense the Church goes back to Christ. The Church was sure to grow out of such a religion as he taught. He called each of his followers to come after him—that is the personal side of the Christian profession. He taught them that they are all brethren and must work and serve together—that is the social side of it. For this social side, but also for the personal side, of the Christian faith, the Church came into being. And Christians have never been able to do without it. All normal Christian faith leads to brotherhood in some form. The Church is the way in which that brotherhood is expressed.

The Church has three main purposes:

1. *It develops believers in the knowledge and spirit of Christ.* They meet for worship and fellowship around the great Christian truths, and to these truths the Church bears constant witness.

2. *It extends the knowledge of Christ to other men so that they become believers.* The Church has been the agency for the spread of the religion of Christ in its immediate surroundings and in farther regions.

3. *It brings the Kingdom of God to expression in the world.* The Church does not exist chiefly for its members but equally for the world around. Multitudes of people receive the benefit of its existence and of its program of service who do not themselves join it.

WHAT IS THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

Presbyterians form one of the major Church groups in America, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. being the largest in that connection. The name "Presbyterian" is derived from the form of government, as is the case with some other Churches. For example, in the "Congregational" group, the congregation is the unit of authority, while any form of the "Episcopal" Church, which takes its name from *Episkopos,* the Greek word for bishop, will have bishops with more or less power. So the Presbyterian Church, which derives its name from the Greek word meaning elder, finds its governing power in elders or "presbyters." The unit of authority is the "presbytery," which con-

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sists of ministers, "teaching elders," and representatives of the local Churches called "ruling elders."

The name Presbyterian does not describe the creed or practice of the Church, but merely its form of government. This government is republican or representative, standing midway between congregational and episcopal forms. Individual Presbyterian congregations determine a limited number of matters directly, but most of the decisions of the Church are made in the representative bodies. These bodies begin with the "session," or body of elders, elected by the local Church in such numbers as it may desire, though at least two are required. The Churches of a given area are represented in a larger body called the "presbytery." All the presbyteries of a state or similar area are represented in a "synod." The highest body is called "the General Assembly." Any member of any Church has the right of appeal through all these courts to the highest in case he feels that injury is being done to himself or to the cause of Christ. Each of the lower bodies reports to the next higher, so that the General Assembly has supervision of the entire Church, though its authority is only that which it can claim as a representative body.

Presbyterian Churches are prevailingly of the same type in their understanding and teaching of the Christian faith. The one we are just now considering expresses its faith in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in two Catechisms—the Larger and the Shorter. The Confession of Faith is the longest statement of faith held by any Church, consisting of 179 sections, gathered in 35 chapters. The Bible is the only ultimate written authority and all teaching is held in subordination to it. The Confession was adopted in 1729, but has been much revised and is subject to new revisions as they may be needed.

Because the Presbyterian Church is governed on the representative basis, only the officials are expected to subscribe to this Confession, and they accept it as containing, in a system, the doctrines taught in the Scripture. With so long a creed and with so many subscribers to it (at least 80,000 officeholders in this one Church), it is obvious that no slavish uniformity of agreement is attempted. The individual members of the Church are not asked to subscribe to the Confession of Faith at all, but merely to give evidence of sincere faith in Christ. However, the wide doctrinal agreement of its officers gives the Church its strength and unity, and all members are invited to share this agreement.

In 1902, the General Assembly adopted a Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith, which it recommends as a worthy expression of the fuller teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith. New members are not required to accept even this Brief Statement, but it is strongly commended to their attention, and is appended to this booklet.

The Presbyterian Church recognizes the other Churches as part of the Church of Christ. It is not a "sect"—a part cut off from the others—but a "denomination"—that part of the total Christian Church denominated or named Presbyterian. Hence this Church dismisses members readily to other Churches and receives them gladly from others. Its ministers preach in other

pulpits, and ministers of other Churches are welcomed into its pulpits. It welcomes Christian believers of all denominations to all its services and practices, inviting them to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper on equal terms with its own members and joining in any general celebration of the Sacrament. It baptizes infants on the condition that at least one of the parents is a professing Christian, a member of some Christian Church, not necessarily Presbyterian. It has no required order of service, and, while it generally administers baptism by sprinkling, it recognizes the validity of baptism sincerely administered and received by any mode.

WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN BELIEVER JOIN THE CHURCH?

Since the Christian Church is the organization of Christian believers it seems clear that the duty of joining it cannot be urged on any others than believers. But, since the Church is the agency through which the purpose of Christ for the world is most fully executed, it seems equally clear that all such believers may be urged to join it. There are often reasons why a believer should join one particular Church rather than another, but the essential thing is to become part of the total Church of Christ. Waiting to examine this, that, and the other Church is often merely confusing. Any evangelical Church offers opportunity to express and develop the Christian life.

Five reasons for joining the Church apply to all Christian believers:

1. *It is one of the best ways to do the will of Christ.* Jesus expected his disciples to confess him before men, to declare their allegiance to him, to take their places by his side in the presence of the world. In cases where the Church is unpopular there is the more reason for joining it, since it is under such conditions that Christ most needs supporters. There are other ways of confessing Christ, but none is better than to take one's place publicly and unqualifiedly in fellowship with his other followers. There is no better way of letting men know that one is a Christian and hence a follower of Christ. Sheer gratitude to Christ would suggest this.

2. *It is one of the best ways to witness to continuing Christian belief.* "Christians" and "Church members" are identified in virtually all discussion. If anyone asks how many Christians there are in a town, the answer is found by adding up the lists of Church members, unworthy as some of them may be. It is always implied that the unnumbered persons are not Christian believers. Joining the Church does not make one a Christian, and of course Christ knows his followers whether they join the Church or not, but the people in the community do not know them except through their open and willing witness to their own faith. Moreover, such witness strengthens and enriches Christian faith. A person might join the Church for his own sake even if no one else knew of his action.

3. *It is one of the best ways to be a consistent Christian.* The Christian idea requires the development of a human brotherhood. Nowhere is that brotherhood better expressed than in the Church.

4. *It is the very best way to give help to fellow Christians.* A Church member is stronger for being part of a great body of believers and every member of the Church helps to make up that host. This is the largest voluntary institution in the world because so many people have joined it in the past. The only thing that will keep the Church in its helpful place is to have people continue to come into it. There is no closer or more worthy friendship than can be formed within a Christian Church when the members yield themselves to the Spirit of Christ and his call to fraternity. When the Children of Israel started their journey toward Canaan, a certain man spoke of leaving them. Moses urged him to stay, saying, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Still he declined, and Moses said in substance, "Come with us for our sakes; you know the way and you can help us." Which motive was finer? When a man says: "Why should I join the Church? What good will it do me?" the reply might be that this is not the only way to look at it. Sometimes one must ask: "What could I do if I went into the Church? Might I set an example to younger people? Might I encourage others? Could I help, whether it does anything for me or not?" To join the Church for purely selfish reasons may be no more worthy than to do anything else selfishly.

5. *It is the best way to take part in Christ's program in the world.* Does the community need the Church? If so, new members must constantly be found; otherwise the Church will die. Does the world need the Christian program? The Church cannot be finally judged by any of its present performances. It ought to be judged by what it could do, by the program it could carry out. Here are great tasks: making a world brotherhood, service for the neighborhood, bearing witness to the truth of Christ, helping needy people everywhere. What organization or institution could do such things more certainly than a loyal Church? No man can help the world so widely through any other agency as he can through the Church. Of all agencies, it touches human life at most points and touches most lives. No one person can do much, but each member of the Church may add to the large current of help that runs around the world. The Scotsman Chalmers said that "a Christian church is responsible for the physical, social, and moral, as well as the spiritual, condition of all who are within its parish limits not otherwise cared for." Christ would have us broaden the "parish limits" until they take in the human race. And the Church is really attempting more things in behalf of humanity than unbelievers would credit. Most of them think of the Church in terms of some small institution which they know, whereas the Church itself is a vast institution carrying on a vast and intricate work all around the world. The best way to help this work along is by joining the Church and taking one's part honestly in its activities and obligations.

WHAT IS REQUIRED IN JOINING THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

Certainly no one is required to consider that this is the only Church or to discount other Churches. The Presbyterian Church is merely part of the universal Church. The invitation to Presbyterian membership is extended to all Christian believers, whether or not they accept or even know the distinctions that mark this Church among other Christian Churches. No Christian Church would ever knowingly exclude a true believer in Christ who asked for membership. The Presbyterian Church gladly offers its fellowship to all sincere Christian believers. There is no creed offered to new members. The one requirement is that a candidate shall truly accept Christ as his Saviour and Master, using the terms with some sincere meaning. When a young man said to a Church session, "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and my daily Master," the members of the session were satisfied and received him into membership in the Church. Anybody who can be a Christian can be a Presbyterian. The Church door is as wide as the door to Christ himself. The Church is not for perfect people, as the Christian life is not for such people; there are none. It is for people who want to be better and to this end have accepted Christ as Saviour and Master.

There are four steps in the actual process of joining the Presbyterian Church:

1. In most Churches provision is made for at least a little *preliminary instruction in the meaning of the Christian faith.* This is often unnecessary for adults, especially those who have been reared in Christian homes. In place of it there is ordinarily an interview with the pastor, or someone who represents him, for the sake of learning what the step means.

2. At an arranged time, generally publicly announced, *the elders, known as the session, meet to talk with those who wish to unite with the Church.* The purpose of this talk is not what most people mean by an "examination," but is for the sake of discovering whether Christ has been accepted and the candidate is truly a believer. Ordinarily the pastor makes the inquiries, though the conversation often becomes entirely informal and general. The applicant for membership is perfectly free to ask any questions that may be in his mind. It is not an "ordeal," but a meeting with Christian men who are deeply interested in new members.

3. Unless the candidate has been baptized in infancy or at some other time, *arrangements are made for his baptism,* generally in connection with the public reception into the Church, and by sprinkling, according to Presbyterian practice. Baptism is taken as a seal, divinely appointed, of acceptance by Christ as his follower and of entrance into the fellowship of the Church. In the Presbyterian Church rebaptism is not required, no matter in what Church the ordinance may previously have been received.

4. If the members of the session are satisfied, *they vote to receive the new*

member and this vote makes him a full member of the Presbyterian Church. But at the next public opportunity ordinarily in connection with a celebration of the Lord's Supper, arrangements are made for the public welcome of new members. At this time each Church follows its own custom, calling new members to come forward or to rise in their places, or merely naming them, as seems best. The questions publicly asked are only such as involve the confession of Christ as Saviour and Master and the purpose to follow him and to be loyal to the Christian fellowship. This public reception is not an essential part of joining the Church, but it is almost universally practiced and is most helpful in that it gives fellow Christians a realization of the additions to their number and also gives the new members an opportunity to make a public declaration of faith in assenting to the questions asked.

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

One of the first experiences of a new Church member is the receiving of the Lord's Supper, the most distinctive practice of the Christian faith. This service has four names:

1. It is called *the Lord's Supper* because Christ first gave it in connection with the Passover supper just before his betrayal and death.

2. It is called *the Communion* or "the Holy Communion," another term, because believers are bound to Christ and to each other in it; they find communion or fellowship in sitting together and partaking of the same simple food, reminding them of the body and blood of Christ.

3. It is called, somewhat rarely, *the Eucharist,* from a Greek word meaning "giving thanks" which was used in connection with its early observance; it implies that in this service believers give thanks for the gift of Christ's life and love.

4. It is frequently called *the Sacrament,* from the Latin word, *sacramentum,* meaning an oath or covenant, implying that in this service believers enter into covenant with Christ and with each other to live the Christian life and that Christ enters into covenant with his followers to sustain and strengthen them.

Some Churches observe this Sacrament frequently and find help in doing so. In the Presbyterian Church it is administered only a few times a year, usually from four to six times, because of the feeling that it will be more impressive if the experience is not too frequent. Believing that the Lord's Supper is intended for all disciples of Christ, the Presbyterian Church invites believers from all Churches to partake whenever it is observed. So far as Christian courtesy will permit, Presbyterians also gladly partake when they are present in other Churches. Observance of the Sacrament is counted an especial duty in the regular order of the Church. This is partly because of the explicit word of Christ, and partly because of the meaning of the Sacrament. At the Passover supper Christ broke bread so that all the disciples might partake of it, telling

them it represented his body which was broken for them. Then he took the cup, containing what he called "the fruit of the vine," and gave it to all his disciples, telling them it represented his blood which was being poured out for them. He said that this was to be done in remembrance of himself, to bring to mind the great facts of his death in behalf of men. As these elements are received, the partakers are asked to realize anew their close relation to him and to each other. It is not a sad experience; it reminds believers of a saving death and sends them out to better service. In the Presbyterian Church the elements are thought of as symbols, not in themselves changed in their use in the Sacrament, though it is realized that sincere partaking does bring blessing to the heart and life, and more intimate relation to Christ.

Careful preparation for the Sacrament seems wise. The preparation involves serious thought of oneself, clearing the life from sins which can be cast out, forgiving all who have offended and rectifying any offense committed against others, careful inquiry as to whether the life is right and is kept on the high level which the Christian profession anticipates. There is no magic or strange power about the Sacrament, but it has rich and constant meaning for Christian believers who will observe it sincerely and thoughtfully.

The Sacrament is ordinarily administered in connection with a regular service of worship, but it may be asked for in cases of illness for comfort and reassurance or it may be administered at any time of great significance in the Christian life. Since it is a Church ordinance, it is expected that a minister will officiate in its administration.

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS?

Of course no one ought to unite with an organization to which he does not intend to be faithful and in which he does not mean to do his part. Some Churches have provided manuals or handbooks of rules to guide their members. The Presbyterian Church has found it best not to do this or to lay down rules of conduct. From time to time the various courts of the Church make recommendations for or against certain practices or actions, but the only requirements are those that cover the Christian life itself. Some of these are very clear:

1. A Church member ought to *maintain the habits of the Christian life,* such as regular reading of the Bible as God's Word, prayer, attendance upon Church services and societies which are intended for his group or class, and support of Church agencies in such method and measure as may be possible for him.

2. Remembering that the Christian religion spreads by contagion, a Church member ought to *set a worthy example before the observing world.* No extravagant demands of perfection are made before this example can be set. The Church is not a place for "perfect" people but for men who know that they are imperfect and want to be better and more worthy of Christ than they are.

3. To *give systematically* is a Christian duty. The Presbyterian Church lays down no rules for this. The Bible makes much use of the "tithe," or tenth, of one's income as a basis of measurement. It is a convenient standard, but its purpose must be kept in mind. It does not suggest that part of one's possessions belongs to God; in reality everything belongs to him. Christians are stewards, holding all in trust for God—time, money, strength, ability, everything. Part of each possession is allowed for the use of the steward; part must be put into the program of God in carrying out his purpose. It is this part which Christians give. So the Church, with its world-wide program, is supported. In the Presbyterian Church there is a "budget system" whereby a weekly subscription is made, together with any special gifts that may seem wise. From man to man all giving is purely voluntary; from man to God it is a solemn obligation which earnest men can convert into a deep joy.

4. Church members ought to *become increasingly intelligent about Christian work around the world.* It is not logical to belong to an institution without supporting the vital movements that it sponsors. New members ought to secure and read a reliable Church paper in which matter for the strengthening of personal religion and news of the Church's life and work are brought to their knowledge. It is always regrettable when a member selects certain forms of Church work as those in which he "believes," or means to support, leaving others out of account. None of the work of a Christian Church can be omitted without crippling the whole. All of it is the concern of all the members, though of course no one member can take definite part in everything, and in a large Church it is inevitable that most members will specialize in the work they do. But every member should help somewhere.

The principal duty at all times is to live the Christian life in all relationships. This involves keeping a right personal relation to Christ and also practicing the Christian way of living.

HOW IS ONE'S PERSONAL RELATION TO CHRIST MAINTAINED?

There is no magic about keeping up a healthy personal Christian life. It demands some degree of attention, but no form of disposition or temperament forbids it. Each Christian can discover the way by which Christ becomes real in his own life. Such suggestions as the following may be helpful:

1. *Making Christ a constant standard.* Life cannot be divided into sections, some to be lived according to Christ's teaching and others according to some other standard. The only healthy way is to live the whole life sincerely as a Christian believer. No one ever goes far wrong in personal life while he is sincerely trying to be right. The Apostle Paul advised a young Christian to "remember Jesus Christ." Nothing keeps personal religion alive more certainly than the habit of applying the standards of Christ to all of life, not morbidly

but gladly, knowing that he is concerned with all that concerns any of his followers.

2. *Maintaining the Christian habits.* Nothing takes the place of acting like a Christian, doing the things that Christians do.

(*a*) No book takes the place of the Bible as an inspiration to Christian living. Its chief value is that it makes Christ real to sincere readers. Other books may be helpful for this purpose if they turn the mind to spiritual things.

(*b*) No believer can prosper without prayer, finding his own way of practicing it—sometimes joining in public prayer, often using private prayer, practicing the habit of family worship if one is at home, listing many causes for which prayer is offered, freely using printed prayers if they are helpful, following his own methods and choosing his own time and posture.

(*c*) Believers cannot grow without frequenting the place of worship—"not forsaking our own assembling together," as The Epistle to the Hebrews says. No healthy Christian life can be maintained without fellowship with other believers.

3. *Keeping some form of distinctive Christian service.* It is always helpful to perform some regular service solely because one is a Christian. Most hours are naturally occupied with duties which are common to Christians and non-Christians. These duties can be Christianized, but it is well to find some form of service which is peculiarly Christian and followed especially by Christians—something which non-Christians do not do. This tends to keep a believer sensitive to his relation to Christ.

4. *Trusting God in every experience.* Whether things go right, as men judge right, or all wrong does not really alter the Christian life. Christ does not call men to believe in him so that their lives may be smooth, but so that he may sustain them in any experience that comes to them. Some men are crushed by experiences that others endure without losing their poise or their peace. Troubles that leave some men moaning and cursing God leave other men more sure of God than ever. "Though he slay me, yet will I wait for him," are familiar words, but the saying seems impossible to some, who would rather say, "Unless he pleases me, I will not trust him." When the Christian life is sluggish, a man is apt to be critical of God; when it runs vigorously, he is apt to be sure of God. Trusting God in every experience is possible to any believer who sets himself to do it. This results in the deepening of the spiritual life and the strengthening of one's relation to Christ.

HOW DOES ONE GO ON PRACTICING CHRIST'S WAY OF LIVING?

Someone has said that for a Christian the word "grow" can become an acrostic: Go-Right-On-Working. The best way to practice the Christian way

of living is just to go on practicing it. A person learns to play an instrument well by playing it badly at first but keeping persistently at it under the best instruction he can secure. But no man can make another a musician. Each must continue his own study and effort until the habit of striking the right notes and thinking the right successions is so fixed that the early drill is past. Yet to the very end a certain amount of thoughtful attention must be given to any worthy effort of life. The Christian life is no exception. A Christian learns to be a better Christian by being the best Christian he can be day by day.

1. This involves *constant opposition to anything unworthy in oneself*—bad habits, hasty temper, unworthy speech, bad spirit toward others, narrowness, self-importance. These things are not best fought directly; often it is best to pay no heed to them, to forget them as far as is possible. The natural line of attack on personal faults is to cultivate their opposites. A thoughtful Christian once said: "There is a man whom I much dislike. I must find something I can do for him at once; it is the only way I can protect my spirit when I think of him." A Christian may have enemies, as Jesus had, but a Christian cannot be an enemy to anybody, much as he may hate the evil deeds of some men.

2. The Christian way of living involves *a steady effort to bring the principles and spirit of Jesus to bear on the world's needs.* A Christian is meant to be at peace but not at ease in the world. There are no evils that must be let alone or taken for granted. There is room for discussion as to the best methods of attack, but Christian believers are to keep the Kingdom of God clearly in mind and to do anything that sets it forward. Thus they help to overthrow the evils that injure men. The best practice of Christ's way of living is to find some cause which deserves help in the name of Christ and to do one's full share in furthering it.

3. The Christian way of living involves *an intelligent courage, a persistent refusal to be discouraged regarding either oneself or the Christian program.* The Christian religion makes much of ideals, and ideals are discouraging because they seem so far from attainment. But no worthy Christian ideal can ever be easy to attain. Bringing about Christian conditions in society is often a long process. It may take ages. All any Christian is called to do is to set the movement forward as much as he can. In doing this he is practicing Jesus' way of living, since that is what Jesus did. He could say about his part of the work at the end, "It is finished," but the work he had started was still left for his disciples to carry on. Believers of today carry it forward and then hand it on to their successors. Anyone can practice the Christian life in some degree; courageous, hopeful people can do it best.

4. A Christian believer ought to have *a full assurance that the Christian way is the successful way of living in the sight of God.* It carries no guarantee of financial or social success, often as that may come. But it is sure to help in winning the victory for God's program in the world. Also it leads on to that personal victory which the Bible calls becoming like Christ himself. A Christian ought to live his life and do his work with entire confidence, trusting himself

to God, who will never forsake him, no matter what comes in his life. In the same way he trusts the far future to God, who can care for it as no other can. Hence he does not work for the sake of a future reward; he works to help to forward a program of Christ. The outcome for his own life he can leave to God without anxiety. This leaves him entirely free for any service that opens before him. At the same time he has the joy of assurance of future life and fellowship with Christ and his followers in eternity. Many Christian believers are sustained in adverse conditions and inspired in favorable experiences by this assurance.

A Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith Adopted by the General Assembly of 1902

OF GOD

We believe in the everliving God, who is a Spirit and the Father of our spirits; infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being and perfections; the Lord Almighty, most just in all His ways, most glorious in holiness, unsearchable in wisdom and plenteous in mercy, full of love and compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. We worship Him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons in one Godhead, one in substance and equal in power and glory.

OF REVELATION

We believe that God is revealed in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has made gracious and clearer revelations of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. We gratefully receive the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration to be the faithful record of God's gracious revelations and the sure witness to Christ, as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life.

OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

We believe that the eternal, wise, holy and loving purpose of God embraces all events, so that while the freedom of man is not taken away nor is God the author of sin, yet in His providence He makes all things work together in the fulfillment of His sovereign design and the manifestation of His glory; wherefore, humbly acknowledging the mystery of this truth, we trust in His protecting care and set our hearts to do His will.

OF THE CREATION

We believe that God is the Creator, Upholder, and Governor of all things; that He is above all His works and in them all; and that He made man in His own image, meet for fellowship with Him, free and able to choose between good and evil, and forever responsible to his Maker and Lord.

OF THE SIN OF MAN

We believe that our first parents, being tempted, chose evil, and so fell away from God and came under the power of sin, the penalty of which is eternal death; and we confess that, by reason of this disobedience, we and all men are born with a sinful nature, that we have broken God's law, and that no man can be saved but by His grace.

OF THE GRACE OF GOD

We believe that God, out of His great love for the world, has given His only begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners, and in the Gospel freely offers His all-sufficient salvation to all men. And we praise Him for the unspeakable grace wherein He has provided a way of eternal life for all mankind.

OF ELECTION

We believe that God, from the beginning, in His own good pleasure, gave to His Son a people, an innumerable multitude, chosen in Christ unto holiness, service and salvation; we believe that all who come to years of discretion can receive this salvation only through faith and repentance; and we believe that all who die in infancy, and all others given by the Father to the Son who are beyond the reach of the outward means of grace, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases.

OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

We believe in and confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, who, being the Eternal Son of God, for us men and for our salvation became truly man, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, without sin; unto us He has revealed the Father, by His Word and Spirit making known the perfect will of God; for us He fulfilled all righteousness and satisfied eternal justice, offering Himself a perfect sacrifice upon the cross to take away the sin of the world; for us He rose from the dead and ascended into

Heaven, where He ever intercedes for us; in our hearts, joined to Him by faith, He abides forever as the indwelling Christ; over us, and over all for us, He rules: wherefore, unto Him we render love, obedience, and adoration as our Prophet, Priest, and King forever.

OF FAITH AND REPENTANCE

We believe that God pardons our sins and accepts us as righteous solely on the ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, received by faith alone; and that this saving faith is always accompanied by repentance, wherein we confess and forsake our sins with full purpose of, and endeavor after, a new obedience to God.

OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who moves everywhere upon the hearts of men, to restrain them from evil and to incite them unto good, and whom the Father is ever willing to give unto all who ask Him. We believe that He has spoken by holy men of God in making known His truth to men for their salvation; that, through our exalted Saviour, He was sent forth in power to convict the world of sin, to enlighten men's minds in the knowledge of Christ, and to persuade and enable them to obey the call of the Gospel; and that He abides with the Church, dwelling in every believer as the spirit of truth, of holiness, and of comfort.

OF THE NEW BIRTH AND THE NEW LIFE

We believe that the Holy Spirit only is the author and source of the new birth; we rejoice in the new life, wherein He is given unto us as the seal of sonship in Christ, and keeps loving fellowship with us, helps us in our infirmities, purges us from our faults, and ever continues His transforming work in us until we are perfected in the likeness of Christ, in the glory of the life to come.

OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE TO COME

We believe that in the life to come the spirits of the just, at death made free from sin, enjoy immediate communion with God and the vision of His glory; and we confidently look for the general resurrection in the last day, when the bodies of those who sleep in Christ shall be fashioned in the likeness of the glorious body of their Lord, with whom they shall live and reign forever.

OF THE LAW OF GOD

We believe that the law of God, revealed in the Ten Commandments and more clearly disclosed in the words of Christ, is forever established in truth and equity, so that no human work shall abide except it be built on this foundation. We believe that God requires of every man to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God; and that only through this harmony with the will of God shall be fulfilled that brotherhood of man wherein the Kingdom of God is to be made manifest.

OF THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

We believe in the Holy Catholic Church, of which Christ is the only Head. We believe that the Church Invisible consists of all the redeemed, and that the Church Visible embraces all who profess the true religion together with their children. We receive to our communion all who confess and obey Christ as their divine Lord and Saviour, and we hold fellowship with all believers in Him.

We receive the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, alone divinely established and committed to the Church, together with the Word, as means of grace; made effectual only by the Holy Spirit, and always to be used by Christians with prayer and praise to God.

OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again in glorious majesty to judge the world and to make a final separation between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked shall receive the eternal award of their sins, and the Lord will manifest the glory of His mercy in the salvation of His people and their entrance upon the full enjoyment of eternal life.

OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE AND THE FINAL TRIUMPH

We believe that it is our duty, as servants and friends of Christ, to do good unto all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's Day, to preserve the sanctity of the family, to uphold the just authority of the State, and

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so to live in all honesty, purity, and charity, that our lives shall testify of Christ. We joyfully receive the word of Christ, bidding His people go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, and declare unto them that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We confidently trust that by His power and grace, all His enemies and ours shall be finally overcome, and the kingdoms of this world shall be made the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. In this faith we abide; in this service we labor; and in this hope we pray,

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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